



Washington, December 13, 2022

Press release

Open letter calls on Sec. Blinken to help free Nigerian woman jailed for blasphemy

Rhoda Ya'u Jatau, a mother of five, has been in prison for nearly seven months

Today, a large coalition of religious freedom and human rights organizations, experts and practitioners released [an open letter](#) to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, asking him to intervene on behalf of Rhoda Ya'u Jatau, a Nigerian Christian woman imprisoned while waiting trial for blasphemy.

“We respectfully urge you to intervene with the Nigerian authorities at the highest levels to secure Rhoda’s freedom,” the signatories wrote to the secretary of state. “We likewise urge you to make it clear to the Nigerian authorities your firm opposition to blasphemy laws.”

Jatau, 45, was arrested in Nigeria’s Bauchi State on May 20, after she shared a video condemning the recent murder of Deborah Yakubu, a Christian university student in Nigeria who had herself been accused of blasphemy. After her arrest, a mob attacked Jatau’s Christian-majority neighborhood in the town of Katanga, burning houses and assaulting local residents.

Jatau’s husband and five children have had to relocate to another city for safety. Jatau’s husband has been banned from visiting his wife in prison.

The open letter comes as Nigeria’s president, Muhammadu Buhari, is arriving in Washington DC for the three-day U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit. Buhari has not commented on Jatau’s case; he refused to condemn Deborah Yakubu’s murder, and said that the blasphemy accusations against her should have been handled by “the constituted authority.”

While Jatau has been charged with “exciting contempt of religious creed” under the Nigerian Penal Code, Bauchi State is also one of twelve Nigerian states that has adopted *shari’a* law. In recent years, several Nigerians have been sentenced under the *shari’a* to lengthy prison sentences, or even death, for perceived insults to Islam.

Despite these cases, as well as a surge in violent attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria’s south and Middle Belt, on November 30, the U.S. State Department once again refused to add Nigeria to the U.S.’s list of “Countries of Particular Concern” for religious freedom violations. The independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), as well as a wide range of Nigerian and international human rights groups, had called on the State Department to add Nigeria to the CPC list. USCIRF called the refusal to add Nigeria to the list “inexplicable” in light of “the State Department’s own reporting.”

The letter to Blinken was organized by Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and signed by twenty-five organizations and twelve individuals, including CSI's president Dr. John Eibner, and the Baroness Cox, an independent member of the House of Lords in the UK. Other signing organizations include ADF International, Genocide Watch, In Defense of Christians, and the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights.

Commenting on the letter, CSI's Eibner said, "Both the judicial incarceration of Rhoda and the extrajudicial lynching of Deborah for allegedly violating Islamic blasphemy laws are symptomatic of the Fulani Muslim supremacism that claims the lives, the liberty and the land of millions of Christians and other Nigerians."

"President Buhari's visit to Washington this week is an excellent opportunity for Secretary Blinken to demonstrate the seriousness of the U.S.'s commitment to religious freedom – by intervening on Rhoda's behalf," Eibner concluded.

About CSI

Christian Solidarity International is an international human rights group campaigning for religious liberty and human dignity.

Contact: Joel Veldkamp | joel.veldkamp@csi-int.org